

Movie sequels rarely do well. Just think about it: who likes The Mask part 2: son of the Mask, Robocop 3, Pirates of the Caribbean, Like Mike 2, Madea part 11, Space Jam 2 (Lebron aint no MJ). Now, there is at least one exception . . . or 5 Rocky just kept getting better. / Luke's sequel may not be better than the original, but man its so good. Acts is the sequel to Luke – Luke volume 2. Luke volume 1 covers the work of the descended Christ and Luke volume 2 covers the work of the ascended Christ. And we've just finished it. Almost. Needed one more week with Dr. Luke. Acts has been so rich and is such a corrective to our half-hearted and cold-blooded Christianity in the West.

We started the book on 9/1/2024. This is the final sermon, number 38 [855]. Acts records an incredible time period in redemptive history. 30 years that changed the world. For you ladies in the Simeon study, the melodic line of the book is "The risen and reigning Lord Jesus Christ is continuing to expand his Kingdom by filling his people with his Spirit and empowering them to witness and plant churches to the ends of the earth." Something like that. Remember: **Structure** 1:1-11 Ascension, 1:12-8:1 Witness in Jerusalem, 8:2-12:23 Witness in Judea and Samaria, Ethiopia, and Syria, 13:1-28:31 Witness to the ends of the earth / I want to review and summarize the book of Acts with 8 theological themes:

1. The Present Reign of King Jesus – This book is traditionally called the Acts *of the Apostles*. They do a lot of acting in here, but that's not quite right. **1:1-3**. Acts is about the acts of the risen and reigning Lord Jesus Christ – King Jesus. Christ is a claim not a name. He is the King. That's why this whole book is sandwiched by Kingdom: Acts 1 Jesus teaching on the Kingdom, Acts 28 Paul proclaiming the Kingdom in Rome. And how does the King *act*? Through his church. Through you. *You* are an instrument of the King. You are called to Kingdom work. This whole new covenant thing is a reclamation project – putting the human project back on track. Gen 1: humanity to multiply and rule and subdue, take ground for the King. So also the new humanity. We are to multiply and raise and educate kids in the Christian faith and plant and strengthen embassies for the King all over the world. / And what does he use to rule? His Word. Stott: Scripture is the royal scepter by which the King rules.

2. The Effectiveness of the Word of God – The Word of God is an extension of God himself.¹ So to have a high view of God is to have a high view of God's Word. Which is why Acts is so full of teaching and preaching. Roughly one third of the book is speeches: 15 sermons and 4 defense speeches.² God works through his Word. **6:7, 12:24, 13:49, 19:20**. 2 Tim 2:9: even when Paul is bound with chains, the Word of God is not bound. The Word is effective because the Spirit wrote it, . .

3. The Power of the Spirit – Matthew mentions the Spirit 5 times, Mark 4 times, Luke: 53 times in Luke/Acts. Luke 24:49: "And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Stay put, you aint ready yet, but I'm sending the Spirit. / **1:8, 2:1-4**. The NC church is born as the Spirit lit the flame. / We see the power of the Spirit through the Word and works **3:6-9** / When the Spirit filled the people they spoke the Word with boldness **4:31**. The Spirit is the empowering presence of God. Acts is about the Acts of Jesus Through the Spirit and the Book the Spirit wrote. God's work God's way.

¹ 1:1 - Jesus teaches through preaching. Eph 2:17.

² 11:25-26 18:11 19:9-10 20:7-12 20-21 28-32 28:30-31.

4. The Fulfilment of Scripture - There are some 35 OT quotations and just under 390 allusions to the OT in the book of Acts. Just to give a couple examples: **2:16, 25, 34**. The story of the early church is the continuation of the story of Israel. In fact, many scholars see the book of Acts as recording the restoration of Israel. **Acts 1:6-8**. These verses are laced with the prophet Isaiah. Four allusions from Isaiah's vision of the restoration of Israel: **Isa 49:1-6**.

This is why Matthias had to replace Judas in Acts 1. Need to get back to that number 12 – a symbolic reconstitution of the 12 tribes. **3:18-26, 15:14-19**. / Acts is about the transition from the OC to the NC. Remember what happened at the inauguration of the OC? 3 K died 2:41, after Pentecost, the inauguration of the NC: and there were added that day about three thousand souls." 2 Cor 3: the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

5. The Sovereignty of God – God is the divine director of world history. There is this little Greek word: *Dei* – that occurs 40x in Luke/Acts. It means: it is necessary. God is sovereign. **2:23, 4:27-28**. / God is also sovereign in salvation: **13:48, 18:9** Remember the sov of God doesn't make ev and missions pointless but finally possible. Acts relays the sure and sovereign purposes of God.

6. The Inevitability of Suffering - 8:1-4, 14:22. Jesus said this would be the case. He sends us as sheep amidst wolves. You will be hated by all for my name's sake. The world, the flesh, and the devil are adamantly opposed to the promotion and expansion of the Kingdom of Christ. He tries persecution from the Jews, compromise within the church, distraction and disunity. It is hard to be a faithful, Bible-believing Christian. But, take heart:

7. The Indestructability of the Church – Listen to J.C. Ryle: "Has the true Church been oppressed in one country? It has fled to another. Has it been trampled on and oppressed in one soil? It has taken root and flourished in some other climate. Fire, sword, prisons, fines, penalties, have never been able to destroy its vitality. Its persecutors have died and gone to their own place, but the Word of God has lived, and grown and multiplied. Weak as this true Church may appear to the eye of man, it is an anvil which has broken many a hammer in times past, and perhaps will break many more before the end. He who lays hands on it, is touching the apple of God's eye!" Suffering is inevitable, but fret not, Jesus promised: I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Persecution will come, but as Tertullian said: the blood of the saints is seed for the growth of the church. (Like whack a mole).

8. A Counter-Cultural Community – the Spirit-filled church is created in Acts 2 and is a contrast society, a counter-cultural community. We learn 8 marks of the new humanity (young preachers, that's how you subtly turn an 8 point sermon into an 16 point sermon – file that away for later):

i. Allegiance to King Jesus – These brothers and sisters were absolutely sold out for the Lord Jesus Christ. **4:12, G, 4:20, 5:41-42, 17:7, 20:24**. / Listen to NT scholar, Michael Green: "It would probably not be an exaggeration to say that disobedience is one of the main characteristics of modern Christianity. We know what Jesus teaches but we do not do it. Disobedience in sexual morals, in relationships, in attitudes to those who make life hard for us. Disobedience in lack of hospitality, in begrudging our

money, in unwillingness for change. Our disobedience is not marginal to our lives: it is central. We do not make time to spend with God, but give it all to our work and our pleasure. We do not set our affections on things above and find treasure in heaven, but are more materialistic than any previous generation has ever been. We do not obey the Lord's last command to go and make disciples. Instead we are hesitant about the content of the good news, and reluctant to talk about it."

ii. Deep Community - 2:42-47. Someone has reworked this section to make it fit consumer Christianity rather than NT Christianity: "They studied the Apostle's teaching when they had time. They went to fellowship when they could fit it in. They prayed when they needed something and got coffee together every now and then. They sometimes talked about generosity but kept most of their possessions for themselves, two out of five Sundays they came to church gatherings. They didn't invite people into their homes and rarely revealed their hearts. They were largely irrelevant to all the people, and occasionally, someone was randomly saved."

"Day by day." There is a priority of the gathering of the church. Members, this is the lowest bar: be at the big 4. Here is how our covenant puts it, "We are ruled by God's Word. We will not forsake the gathering of ourselves together, but will prioritize corporate worship, treasuring our church's weekly opportunities to sing the Word, pray the Word, hear the Word, and see the Word displayed in the ordinances."

iii. Extravagant Generosity – "they were selling their possessions and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need." **4:32-35.** Our giving in the States is pathetic – average is less than 3% among Evangelical Christians. It is no wonder the church in America is so weak and Christians are so worldly. The heart is bound up with their treasure and their treasure is the things of earth. The early church owned stuff, but were not owned by their stuff.

iv. Bold Witness – These first Christians were bold. Michael Green said, "You cannot defeat men like this. Tell them to keep quiet, and they disobey you. Throw them into prison, and they convert the jailer. Whip them, and they rejoice to be allowed to suffer for Christ. Stone them to within an inch of their lives in one city, and they carry on with just the same message in the next. Kill them, and others arise to take their place. Endurance like that simply has to win in the long run. But we do not see enough of it in our western church."³ Like, Paul – you gon chain him up. It is not that Paul was chained to the guards but that the guards were chained to Paul. Or Stephen, boldly preaching, prayerfully dying.

Why? Because of the risen and reigning Lord Jesus Christ is with him. Remember kids? I will be with you. The tomb is empty and the throne is occupied. The right man is at the helm of the cosmos. John Wesley: "I have never known more than fifteen minutes of anxiety or fear. Whenever I feel fearful emotions overtaking me, I just close my eyes and thank God that He is still on the throne reigning over everything, and I take comfort in His control over the affairs of my life."

³ 30 Years, 64.

And remember, it wasn't the leaders, but normal Christians. Bold witness by ordinary people with extraordinary power as they evangelize, give, and suffer for the sake of the spread of the gospel. That's the first Christians. One missions historian says, "Nothing is more notable than the anonymity of these early missionaries. . . Luke does not turn aside to mention the name of a single one of those pioneers who laid the foundation. Few, if any, of the great Churches were really founded by apostles. Peter and Paul have organized the Church in Rome. They certainly did not found it."⁴

Or Michael Green again: "The gospel spread most of all by the enthusiastic witness of the nameless people who loved Jesus and could not keep quiet about him. It was a people movement, this early Christianity. That is why it succeeded. It did not depend on big names, but on little people who had a big God and were not afraid to put him to the test as they went out in his name. And if that is not a challenge and a rebuke to the modern church, I do not know what is." Later he says, "They challenge us to put evangelism at the head of our list of priorities, and give ourselves to it wholeheartedly."⁵

v. Faithful and Fruitful – They multiplied **2:42, 47, 5:14, 6:7, 12:24, 16:5, 19:20**. They were committed to church planting, the multiplication of churches, what Luke calls "the Work" **13:1-4, 14:21-23**. / The pattern is go to key cities, evangelize, raise up elders, establish churches.

vi. God-fearing Leadership – All throughout Acts, you see God work through Godly leaders. Always in the plural, even though certain names are highlighted. We hear about Paul a lot, but he was no solo worker. There are 100 names linked with Paul in the NT, 38 as co-workers. Paul wrote 2 Tim 2:2 and practiced it. Green again: "The essence of all New Testament leadership is to be an enabler of others. . . . There are too many stars around, and not nearly enough equippers."⁶

In ch. 6, there was disunity in the church in the women's ministry, so God ordains the office of deacon. These men – and they are men (*aner*) - are to be full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. They handle practical matters in the church to preserve unity and to free of the elders so they can "devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Paul addresses the elders of FBC Ephesus and says, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood" (20:28).

vii. Multi-Ethnic⁷ – King Jesus saves people from Jerusalem but has wider plans: Samaria and the ends of the earth, not just Jews but also Gentiles! **10:15, 35, 36, 45, 11:1, 9, 18, 20**. / Jesus takes ground through his church in Jerusalem, Judea, Galilee, Samaria, in the cities of Lydda, Joppa, Damascus, Caesarea, Tyre, Sidon, Tarsus, Antioch, Salamis, Paphos, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Perge, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, the regions of Achaia and Asia Minor, Troas,

⁴ Neill, "History of Christian Missions, 22.

⁵ Green, 43.

⁶ Green, 217.

⁷ 2:9-10

Miletus, Puteoli, Rome, to Abilene, TX. / That sending church in Antioch was led by Barnabas a Levite from Cyprus, Simeon from Africa, Lucius of Cyrene in N Africa, and Manean, a wealthy Roman.

viii. Prayer-Dependent - 26 of 28 times the church gathers it is for prayer. **1:14, 2:42, 4:23, 6:4, 12:5**

Prayer was a way of life. We have a corporate prayer meeting tonight from 5-6. Be like the first Christians and prioritize prayer together.

Last week, Samuel pointed out that Acts has an abrupt ending. It just cuts off with lots of questions provoked but unanswered. It just ends. / Intentionally so. Because this story is far from over. In fact, its just beginning. There is a church planting network called Acts 29. A more brilliant name could not be imagined. Fam, let's be about that Acts 29 life together.